
Appendix B. Public Involvement

This appendix provides summaries of the public meetings that were held in the Borough regarding the project, and a copy of the newsletter that was mailed to agencies and other organizations, and individuals in the community.

Public meeting summaries

The following summaries describe discussions that occurred at public meetings held in South Naknek and Naknek in June and October of 2003, and March of 2004. The purpose of these meetings was to better understand public opinions about the current transportation situation, and the ideas and attitudes about future transportation options.

June 17 & 18, 2003 meetings

On June 17 and 18, 2003, representatives of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, the Federal Aviation Administration, and a team of consultants led by Northern Economics held public meetings in Naknek and South Naknek to discuss the current transportation system and a proposed bridge crossing of the Naknek River.

The major components of the current transportation system in the Bristol Bay Borough consist of:

A jet-capable airport at King Salmon

A recently improved gravel airfield at South Naknek

A gravel airfield at Naknek

A float plane base at Nornak Lake, adjacent to the Naknek airfield

A paved highway between King Salmon and Naknek

Other aviation activity occurs at Tibbets Field, located near the Naknek airport, and there is floatplane activity on the Naknek River near the King Salmon Airport. Local road networks exist in each community.

The following paragraphs summarize the key points raised in those meetings.

The current transportation system increases the cost of living and operating businesses in South Naknek. In the summer, people and cargo use air taxi services, skiffs, and barges for traveling between South Naknek and Naknek or King Salmon. In the winter, after sufficient ice thickness is achieved, people can drive snowmachines and vehicles across the river, or use air taxi services. The roundtrip airfare for an individual traveling between Naknek and South Naknek is \$60.00, if traveling alone, and the one-way cost to move a car by barge in the summer is \$500. The transportation costs affect a number of organizations. For example, parents of South Naknek students that attend Naknek schools are flown to parent-teacher conferences at school district expense. South Naknek emergency services personnel pay for their own travel costs to attend training in Naknek or King Salmon.

In addition to the high transportation costs imposed on South Naknek residents and businesses by this transportation system, safety is a primary issue. The school district has been flying South Naknek junior high and high school students to Naknek schools for 30 years. One winter a plane had mechanical problems and landed on the river ice. A similar

situation during times when ice is not present could have dramatic consequences for the community. The concern about safety is always present in the minds of South Naknek parents whose children fly on a daily basis.

The school charters impose other costs as well. For example, the school flights operate under visual flight rules in daylight only. In mid-winter this results in children arriving at school at 9:45 a.m., 45 minutes after school commences. The requirement to fly during daylight hours also constrains the ability of South Naknek students to participate in after-school activities. At times bad weather will result in students not being able to return home. On those days the school district incurs costs for housing students in private homes on the north side of the river.

Emergency services are also affected by bad weather. There is concern in the community about the availability of medical evacuation flights during bad weather to transport people that may need immediate medical care. The majority of emergency services personnel in the Bristol Bay Borough are located on the north side of the river and the present transportation system hinders their ability to support or assist their counterparts in South Naknek.

The present transportation system requires the Bristol Bay Borough and a number of other agencies to maintain separate facilities on both sides of the Naknek River. With a bridge available it is anticipated that a number of facilities would be consolidated with subsequent savings to local, state, and federal government budgets, and the possibility of lower local tax rates or improved services if redundant facilities do not need to be maintained. Residents mentioned a number of facilities that are potential candidates for consolidation. These included the post office, health clinic, landfill, emergency services, and the library.

South Naknek residents also believe that a bridge would stimulate economic development in the community and offer new business opportunities, resulting in new jobs that would offset any losses from consolidation. Among the businesses mentioned were a gas station, restaurants, boat haulout and repair, and tourism-related businesses. None of the fish processing plants located in South Naknek are processing at this time and it is believed that a bridge will lower operating costs for these facilities and result in some of them reopening. A reopened plant or plants would also make ice available for setnet fishers whose sites are located south of the Naknek River and improve the quality of fish harvested in the area. Improved quality is very important as the Alaska wild salmon industry faces continuing competition from farmed salmon.

October 7 & 8 2003 meetings

On October 7th & 8th the Department of Transportation in conjunction with the Northern Economics consultant team held two public hearing meetings in both Naknek and South Naknek. The purpose was to provide the public with preliminary findings to date and collect additional public input regarding a crossing between the two communities.

Patrick Burden of NEI provided a preliminary briefing on project analysis progress. This included the proposed evaluation criteria for analyzing the alternatives, and low, mid, and high cost estimates for the various alternatives. The remainder of the two meetings included periods of discussion and clarification of alternatives.

Mike Scott with DOT made a brief announcement regarding his position with DOT. Governor Murkowski has a positive outlook towards national resource development. The

fishing industry has waned and therefore, the community either needs to see an improvement in the fishing industry or need to look towards economic diversification/ i.e., resource development.

The following paragraphs detail the discussion and comments gathered during the public meetings.

In general, residents prefer to spend money locally, however the high cost of transportation between South Naknek and Naknek limits their ability to do so. One round trip ticket to Naknek from South Naknek costs \$80. Because of the high costs of transportation, one South Naknek household estimated that they spend about \$7,000 per year ordering groceries from Costco in Anchorage and having them shipped to their home. If it cost less to travel between Naknek and South Naknek they would buy more groceries at the local store, putting more money into the local economy.

In order to determine the average expenditure on transportation costs for Naknek and South Naknek households, people were asked to estimate the amount their household spend annually on air travel between South Naknek and Naknek or King Salmon.

Nine members of the audience, each representing a different household, responded to the request by raising their hand as different amounts were mentioned. The responses are shown in Table 1

Table 1. Estimated Annual Cost of Airfare per Households

Cost	Households
Less than \$1,000	3
Less than \$2,000	1
Less than \$3,000	3
Less than \$4,000	0
Less than \$5,000	0
Greater than \$5,000	2

Considering these expenditures on transportation, meeting attendees commented that have a bridge would strengthen the local economy. The bridge would enhance capabilities of getting materials across the river. Others commented that jobs and wages could be significantly impacted if the bridge were constructed.

In addition, the Southwest Alaska Vocational Center in King Salmon has recently opened. Many evening classes are offered however, residents of South Naknek cannot attend due to limited flight times during the winter months (planes do not fly in the dark).

It was also mentioned that weather conditions make driving easier than flying.

Meeting attendees strongly stressed that closing the Naknek airport before a bridge is in place is **not** an option. Also, rather than closing the Naknek Airport after a bridge is constructed an ADOT representative recommended that a local sponsor take over the operation and

maintenance of the airport. A petition to keep Tibbets Field open has been submitted to ADOT.

The air and gas group attending the meeting suggested the bridge be constructed in five years, rather than the 10 years referenced in the presentation.

Concerns have also been voiced over the impact on subsistence. Comments during the meeting suggested there might not be a large impact on subsistence activities. The Alaska Peninsula Corporation owns a majority of the land, and therefore access to land would be limited due to the private land ownership. Hunting on private land is legal only with a permit, therefore it is expected that building the bridge would cause minimal impact on subsistence activities near South Naknek.

March 15 & 16 2004 meetings

- Public: What is the estimated bridge cost? Planning team: \$20 to \$40 Million.
- Public: The numbers of trips driving over the river (snowmachine or vehicle) may be a low compared to the current winter season because over the previous two winters the weather was warm and there were limited periods when residents could drive over the river.
- Public: This year the number of trips by snow machine and other vehicles will be higher than stated in the PowerPoint because of the longer period when the river was sufficiently frozen.
- Public: Do the airport cost estimates in the presentation include the improvement costs at King Salmon? Planning team: Yes.
- Mayor: Is there a breakout by town (King Salmon and Naknek) for public opinions regarding the alternatives? Planning team: Northern Economics will do this breakdown to see if there is a difference between these two communities.
- Public officials: The cost benefit consolidation of \$300,000 seems to be a little low. John Alder with the Borough will look into the validity of the Borough consolidation costs.
- Mayor: Happy to see the public support for the bridge. However, the Borough does not have Airport Powers and the public would need to vote and approve the Borough having these powers; however, the Mayor would not support this action at this time due to the condition of the Naknek Airport. Numerous improvements need to happen prior to supporting this. In regards to the South Naknek Airport, there does not seem to be as many concerns.
- Public: The annual savings is the driving factor of this report for the Borough.

- Public: The mail cost savings discussed would be considered freight. The postal service probably would not have good numbers.
- Public: Major concerns regarding safety at the Naknek Airport. This should have been improved 10 years ago. Even if the bridge is only 7 years out the School District will still be flying kids into the Naknek Airport for those years.
- Public: Why is there \$14 million for a bike path that does not have a location set, but we can't get money for a bridge??
- Public: Bridge would allow for substantial economic development with the bridge.

Bristol Bay Road Considered

Alaska Governor Frank Murkowski recently announced the state's intention, in partnership with Bristol Bay Native Corporation, to open up state and Native corporation lands in the Alaska Peninsula to leasing for oil and gas exploration and development. The state is considering a new road development on the Alaska Peninsula that would over time connect communities between King Salmon and Chignik, while providing access to areas licensed or leased for energy exploration and development.

The administration estimates that potential revenue from the sale of oil and gas leases will more than pay for the \$285 million gravel road. A road crossing the Naknek River would complete an important segment of the overall highway project.

Alaska DOT&PF
Division of Statewide Planning
3132 Channel Drive, Room 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Notes

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Alaska Department of
Transportation and
Public Facilities

Bringing you the
Latest!
Project Update

Schedule

09/15/03 Public Meetings,
Naknek/S. Naknek

12/22/03 Release report for
public comment

03/12/04 Present final report

Contact Information

Eric Taylor
Area Transportation Plans
Alaska DOT&PF
Division of Statewide Planning
3132 Channel Drive, Room 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801
907.465.8958
907.465.6984
eric_taylor@dot.state.ak.us

Project Website

[www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/
projectinfo/proj_master.html](http://www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/projectinfo/proj_master.html)

Naknek Crossing Intermodal Economic Impact



and Airport Use Study

August 2003

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities is examining a potential crossing of the Naknek River. This project is entitled the "Naknek Crossing Intermodal Economic Impact and Airport Use Study." A planning team headed by Northern Economics, Inc. of Anchorage has been hired by the Department to evaluate and recommend regional transportation alternatives.

This study was recommended in the Southwest Alaska Transportation Plan, released in November 2002, which indicated the Naknek crossing may be desirable for safety, access, economic development and cost concerns.

The proposed crossing would entail a bridge spanning the Naknek River and connecting the three communities of the Bristol Bay Borough. A bridge would influence aviation use-patterns, as well as the priority of aviation operations and improvements at individual airport facilities, some of which are already identified and awaiting funding. The bridge alternative being examined

would include trade-offs in transportation, such as the Department relinquishing ownership of one or both of the smaller airports at Naknek and South Naknek, while improving King Salmon airport's capacity for general aviation operations. The multi-modal needs study will define the appropriate level of transportation investment, and examine the distribution of costs and benefits among various interests. The study's aim is to compare the future costs and benefits of a highway crossing to those of improved airports.

The Alaska Department of Transportation has studied this issue over the last several years. The Department is committed to a good regional solution, and is now restricting expenditure of airport improvement funds for Naknek, South Naknek, and King Salmon pending the outcomes of this study. The results of this study will provide the information to guide sound future investments in transportation and economic development for the region. Input from the Bristol Bay communities is a critical element in those decisions.

Summary of Public Meetings Comments

On 17 and 18 June 2003, representatives of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF), the Federal Aviation Administration, and a team of consultants led by Northern Economics held public meetings in Naknek and South Naknek to discuss the current transportation system and a proposed bridge crossing of the Naknek River.

For this study, ADOT&PF is studying transportation in the Bristol Bay Borough as a system, rather than as individual facilities. The major components of the current transportation system in the Bristol Bay Borough consist of:

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Airport operators and users in the Borough expressed the following concerns about air transportation in the area:

- Closure of the King Salmon air traffic control tower could affect the capacity and safety of that airport.
- Operations at Naknek Airport are important to the region because it is located near shopping, services, recreation, and the school system. 70 or more aircraft are parked there, partly due to better wind protection than other airports in the area.
- South Naknek students need safe transportation to school in Naknek.
- Naknek Airport needs safety upgrades, and South Naknek Airport needs surface repair.
- The timing of airport improvements and/or potential airport closures is critical; there needs to be an interim plan before any new transportation facilities are constructed 10 or more years from now.



The following paragraphs summarize other key points raised in those meetings.

The current transportation system increases the cost of living and operating businesses in South Naknek. In the summer, people and cargo use air taxi services, skiffs, and barges for traveling between South Naknek, and Naknek or King Salmon. In the winter, after sufficient ice thickness is achieved, people can drive snowmachines and vehicles across the river, or use air taxi services. The roundtrip airfare for an individual traveling between Naknek and South Naknek is \$60 if traveling alone, and the one-way cost to move a car by barge in the summer is \$500. The transportation costs affect a number of organizations. For example, parents of South Naknek students that attend Naknek schools are flown to parent-teacher conferences at school district expense. South Naknek emergency services personnel pay for their own travel costs to attend training in Naknek or King Salmon.

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processing at this time and it is believed that a bridge will lower operating costs for these facilities and result in some of them reopening. A reopened plant or plants would also make ice available for smelt fishers whose sites are located south of the Naknek River, which would improve the quality of fish harvested in the area. This is very important as the Alaska wild salmon industry faces continuing competition from farmed salmon.

Harbors and Rivers in Alaska Survey Report COE, 1954

A focus on the Bristol Bay and Kodiak region conclusions statement.

"As a result of these studies the District Engineer concludes that the economic development of Southwestern Alaska will derive from its strategic position in the defense of North America and from its principal basic natural resources of fish, minerals, hydroelectric power and recreation. Any improvement of rivers and harbors which may be constructed to aid in the development of these resources will contribute to the welfare of all Alaska and to the United States."

